

Appendix A - Draft Response to Government Consultation on Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Council Meetings

About you

1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

- An elected member of a council body
- A council body
- A member of the public
- A local government sector body

Local government sector body

Please state which organisation this is a response from:

Organisation

South Yorkshire Pensions Authority

Remote Attendance

2. Do you agree with the broad principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?

- Yes
- No

If you answered 'No' to question 2, select 'Continue' and go directly to question 4.

3. If you answered 'Yes' to question 2, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?

Please tick all the options below that correspond with your view and use the free text box for any other comments.

- Any formal meeting allowing remote attendance should have at least two thirds of members in physical attendance
- Members should only be able to attend council meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies
- There should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance

Add any further comments

As a Pensions Authority, the knowledge and understanding requirements for Authority members attending meetings and making decisions are such that it is considered that some in-person attendance is essential in order to ensure the required quality of interaction as part of the meeting itself as well as with the advisers and officers and associated training arrangements.

However, this alongside the flexibility of allowing some remote attendance when required would achieve an appropriate balance.

4. If you are an elected member, can you anticipate that you personally may seek to attend some of your council meetings remotely?

- Yes
- No
- I am not an elected member

4a. If you answered 'No' to question 4, please explain your answer below:

Explain your answer

4b. If you answered 'Yes' to question 4, please indicate below which of the following options best describes your likely pattern of attending meetings remotely:

- Very occasionally
- From time to time
- Regularly but not always
- All the time

5. If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of a council as a whole, what proportion of the council's current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year?

- Less than 10%
- More than 10% but less than 50%
- More than 50% but less than 90%
- Most of them 90% to 100%

6. The government recognises that there may be cases in which it is necessary for councils to hold meetings fully remotely. Do you think there should be limitations placed on the number of fully remote meetings councils should be able to hold?

- Councils should be able to allow full remote attendance at up to half of council meetings within a 12-month calendar period
- Councils should only have the flexibility to change a meeting from in-person to online, or vice versa, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances
- Councils should not have the flexibility to conduct fully remote meetings to ensure there is always an in-person presence

Add any other comments that you have

Answering this question from the perspective of a Pensions Authority, the quality of interaction required and the complexity of the matters being discussed at these meetings means that it is considered essential to ensure there is always an in-person presence - whilst introducing the flexibility that enables individuals to attend remotely on occasion.

7. Do you think there are there any necessary procedural measures that would help to ensure a remote or hybrid attendance policy is workable and efficient?

Tick all the options that correspond with your view and use the free text box for any other comments.

- Councils should be required to publish a list of attendees joining the meeting remotely and give notice if a meeting is being held with full remote attendance
- Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings
- Councils should be required to make arrangements to ensure restricted items (where a council decision is taken in private to protect confidentiality) are managed appropriately and to require remotely attending members to join from a private location

Add any other comments that you have

8. Do you think legislative change to allow councillors to attend local authority meetings remotely should or should not be considered for the following reasons?

Tick all the statements below that apply to your point of view.

Should be considered because:

- It is a positive modernising measure
- It would likely increase the diversity of people willing and able to stand for election in their local area, making councils more representative of the communities they serve
- Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance

Add any other reasons that it should be considered

Should not be considered because:

- Councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings
- It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils
- It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings

Add any other reasons that it should be considered

9. In your view, would allowing councillors to attend formal local authority meetings remotely according to their needs particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics? For example, those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

- It would benefit members
- It would disadvantage members
- Neither

Add any further comments you have on this question

Proxy Voting

10. In addition to provisions allowing for remote attendance, do you consider that it would be helpful to introduce proxy voting?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

11. If yes, for which of the following reasons which may prohibit a member's participation in council meetings do you consider it would be appropriate?

Please select all that apply:

- Physical or medical conditions
- Caring responsibilities
- Parental leave or other responsibilities

Add any other reasons

12. Are there circumstances in which you feel proxy voting would not be appropriate?

Add your comments

We believe that proxy voting is not appropriate for the following reasons.
The debate that takes place during the meeting and the qualitative discussion and further context given to the issues plays a key role in the decisions to be made. This is particularly important in the context of the Pensions Authority given the complexity of the matters being dealt with.
There is also a risk of reduction in the level of participation / engagement in the meetings if proxy voting is permitted.

13. If you think proxy voting is appropriate, are there any limitations you think should be placed upon it?

Add your comments

